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ABSTRACT

The development of oral language proficiency as a requirement for bilingual and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teacher certification in New Jersey is chronicled. Efforts made toward the preparation of bilingual and ESL teachers to accommodate the increasing numbers of limited English proficient students in the state are outlined, beginning with the passage of the New Jersey Bilingual Law in 1975 and the adoption of teacher certification requirements. The following matters are described and explained: the Language Proficiency Interview (LPI) developed by the Educational Testing Service, the statewide language proficiency assessment program, the history of LPI adminstration by the State Department of Education, the transfer of LPI administration from the Educational Testing Service to the Department of Education and subsequently to colleges with approved programs in bilingual and ESL education, and the results of administration of the LPI from 1976 to mid-1981. (MSE)

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ORAL LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT FOR BILINGUAL AND ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE CERTIFICATION IN NEW JERSEY

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INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the development of oral language proficiency as a requirement for Bilingual and ESL certification in New Jersey. Beginning with passage of the New Jersey Bilingual Law in 1975 and the adoption of certification requirements, the paper focuses on the significant strides made in New Jersey for the preparation of Bilingual and ESL teachers to meet the increasing numbers of limited English proficient students in the state.

Initially, the administration of the Language Proficiency Interview (LPI) was assumed by Educational Testing Service and subsequently by the Department of Education. As of September, 1980, language proficiency assessment was transferred to colleges with approved programs in Bilingual and ESL education.

The paper explains the LPI, validity studies, scoring, and training of interviewers and raters. Statistics are provided on language proficiency interviews completed and certificates issued from 1976-81.

New Jersey Bilingual Law

The State of New Jersey has made significant strides to implement regulations which prepare bilingual and ESL teachers to meet the language needs of increasing numbers of limited English proficient students.

In response to legal mandates of Senate Bill No. 811, known as the New Jersey Bilingual Law, signed by Governor Brendan T. Byrne in January 1975, regulations were adopted by the State Board of Education for the certification of Bilingual and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. New Jersey Administrative Code (N.J.A.C.) 6:11-8.8 and 6:11-8.9 prescribe the requirements for certification of bilingual and ESL teachers. Prior to the adoption of these regulations, bilingual and ESL teachers were not required to meet special requirements.

N.J.A.C. 6:11-8.8 requires that applicants for bilingual certification hold a bachelor's degree and an instructional certificate in another field. Also, they must complete 24 semester hours in the field of specialization, including cultural and cross-cultural studies, linguistics, foundations of bilingual education, and theory and practice of teaching the bilingual child and English as a second language. Applicants also are required to demonstrate oral proficiency in English and in the language of instruction.

N.J.A.C. 6:11-8.9 governs the certification of ESL teachers and requires that applicants for ESL education hold a bachelor's degree

and complete 30 credits in the area of specialization. Applicants also are required to demonstrate oral language proficiency in English.

Oral Language Proficiency Requirements

An important and unprecedented step was taken by the State of New Jersey in the requirement of oral language proficiency for certification. The development and implementation of this requirement for qualified oral proficient bilingual and ESL teachers in the schools is the focus of this paper. The progress made by the New Jersey State Department of Education in assessing oral language proficiency has assured the quality of those teachers who have met certification requirements for bilingual and ESL education.

Prior to the adoption of the New Jersey Bilingual Law in 1975, the New Jersey State Department of Education sought the assistance of Educational Testing Service (ETS) in developing methods and procedures to determine native or near-native proficiency in English and proficiency in other languages used as media of instruction. At the time of enactment of the regulations, no adequate processes and procedures were used for assessing the language proficiency of applicants. Colleges and universities indicated they could not provide resources and procedures to assess proficiency and stressed the need for more time to develop them.

Language Proficiency Interview (LPI)

Educational Testing Service developed for the Department of Education the language Proficiency Program, which addressed the evaluation of oral proficiency in Spanish and English and the development of minimum competency levels. The program uses the Language Proficiency Interview (LPI) which is similar to one developed by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) of the United States Department of State and other government agencies. The interviewing procedure and associated rating system developed by FSI have been used by the United States Department of State and other government agencies to measure language proficiency in language learning programs and to select candidates for employment. Results of language proficiency interviews are used in Peace Corps language training programs, course credit for language study, and other language assessment areas requiring a highly valid measure of oral language proficiency in face-to-face interviewing.

The LPI was the best direct measure of communication competence ranging from inability to function in the language to near-native ability. In theory the interview begins with simple questions, becomes progressively more complex, and concludes within 10 to 30 minutes when the applicant could demonstrate his/her highest level of competence.

The LPI differs from other assessment techniques in that ratings are based on overall judgment of language proficiency rather than on numerical calculation based on the number of correct answers. Unlike ratings based on an axis with equidistant points, the ratings for the LPI

may be seen as points on an inverted triangle with ever increasing language knowledge from one rating to another.

The interview is a structured conversation between the candidate and a trained inverviewer. The purpose of the face-to-face interview is to give the candidate an opportunity to demonstrate, in a realistic conversational situation, his/her level of proficiency. It contains no set questions or topics and covers several broad areas of conversation. These topics include family history, work and educational experiences, current events, and other contemporary areas. A variety of topics are discussed depending on the candidate's interests and experiences. Interviewers elicit responses sufficient to assess the candidate's pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and listening comprehension.

The taped interview is given to a rater who assesses proficiency on a scale of 0 to 5 as described below:

Level 0: Unable to function in the language.

Level 1: Able to satisfy routine travel needs and minimum courtesy requirements.

Level 2: Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements.

Level 3: Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social and professional topics.

Level 4: Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs.

Level 5: Speaking proficiency equivalent to that of an educated native speaker.

To ensure that certified teachers in bilingual and ESL education would have at least minimal level of oral language proficiency required in a teaching situation, an empirical study was conducted for the Department of Education by Educational Testing Service that could be the basis for determining minimum passing scores on the Language Proficiency Interview. The study called for the department to select groups of qualified persons to listen to samples of actual interviews and, without knowing the ETS score levels assigned to the interviews, judge each interviewee's performance as adequate or inadequate for the teaching position in question. The samples of interviews in this study were chosen from the total of taped interviews conducted from the inception of the interviewing program in November 1976 to the time of the study in November 1977. Taped interviews during this period were approximately 335 interviews with ESL candidates and 688 interviews in each of the two languages with Spanish/English bilingual candidates. The sample interviews were between 1+ and 4+.

The results of this empirical study assisted the Department of Education in determining minimum oral proficiency levels for certification. Judgment was made based on the following type of question for the judges: "Is the English-speaking proficiency of the person being interviewed at least minimally sufficient for this person to function adequately as an English-as-a-Second-Language teacher in the New Jersey public school program?"

The empirical information presented by the study enabled the department to determine minimum proficiency levels of 3 in English and 4 in the foreign language for bilingual certification and the level of 4 in English for English-as-a-Second Language certification. The participation

of 11 judges in the study for English-bilingual and of eight judges for ESL ensured that the speaking proficiency of the candidate interviewed would be at least minimally sufficient for the candidate to function adequately as a bilingual or ESL teacher.

Language Proficiency Assessment Program

A formal program of language proficiency assessment began in September 1976. From this date through June 1979, ETS administered the program using the interviewers and raters it trained to conduct and rate interviews. For a fee of $20, candidates were interviewed at times and locations determined mutually by ETS and the interviewers. Score reports were provided to candidates.

From inception of the LPI program in fall 1976 to November 1977, tapes were evaluated and the score reported to the candidate. After November 1977 all tapes were rated twice except those with a score of 5. ETS instituted the double rating to ensure reliability. If the scores were identical, the score was reported; if they were not identical, a third rating was conducted and the median score reported. A difference of one point among any of the three scores resulted in a fourth rating by a "master" rater who was an ETS professional staff member with demonstrated fluency in the applicable language and experience in LPI rating.

ETS later measured the reliability of the Spanish interviews. In the study, three additional raters scored each interview tape and compared scores of the raters to determine the likelihood that any tape would be given the same score by a different rater. There was agreement in 85.6% of the scores.

In the assessment program, interviewers were required to be native or near-native speakers. They were trained in full-day workshops in which they learned about the program, listened to taped interviews, observed interviews conducted by ETS and conducted interviews themselves. Raters were required to be native speakers who attended training workshops, particiapted in rating sessions, and listened to and rated "test" tapes. Their ratings of these tapes were compared with official ratings.

In 1979 an on-site review of the language proficiency interview program was conducted by two out-of-state consultants to ensure its reliability and validity in meeting the educational needs of children in the state. The comprehensive two-day on-site review focused on the process and procedures implemented in the assessment program to determine its viability. Special attention was devoted by the consultants to selection of the assessment instrument; training of interviewers and raters; program administration; required proficiency levels; and certification regulations. The on-site evaluation resulted in recommendations that included maintenance of the required proficiency levels; the integration of training sessions for interviewers and raters; the provision for refresher training to update assessment skills; diagnositc review of performance for interviewers; periodic monitoring to ensure reliability of ratings; compilation of data on interviewees; training of additional interviewers; reduced fee to $15 for candidates who repeat tests; the requirement of the LPI for other language groups; and the presentation of suitable identification for interviewees.

Recommendations included in the final report (August, 1979) were reviewed by the Department of Education and during the ensuing year the

following were met:

1. The minimum proficiency levels have been maintained;
2. Refresher sessions for interviewers and raters were conducted;
3. Additional interviewers and raters were trained;
4. The LPI is required for language groups other than Spanish.

LPI Administration by Department of Education

The third year of LPI administration, beginning July 1, 1979 was transferred from ETS to the New Jersey Department of Education, after ETS terminated its direct role in the interview process. Six interview centers were set up by the Department of Education in colleges across the state and at the Bureau of Bilingual Education of the New Jersey Department of Education. Interviews conducted at these centers later were rated by the trained raters. The assessment program was administered by the Bureau of Teacher Education and Academic Credentials of the Department of Education which was responsible for coordinating interviews, sending tapes to the raters; record-keeping procedures; preparing score reports, and maintaining fiscal accounting. Training workshops were conducted for new interviewers and raters and for retraining previously trained interviewers and raters. Training workshops were conducted for trained interviewers and raters in the following languages: Arabic, Cantonese Chinese, French, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish, and Tagalog.

During the first three years that the LPI was used, the regulations regarding oral language proficiency were challenged in court.

Plaintiffs contended that the regulations violated their rights to procedural due process under the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. They conceded in oral argument that their right to continued public employment was uncertain but argued nevertheless that their right to due process was clear. The plaintiffs' conclusion was that the language proficiency interview was arbitrary and capricious and violated their rights to due process of law. The United States District Court decided in favor of the defendants, the New Jersey Department of Education, and maintained that the challenged regulations were not only rationally connected to the state's interest in providing competent teachers, but also mandated by both federal and state law. The Court concluded that the regulations represent a reasonable, coordinated response to a permissible legal obligation. In this regard, bilingual teachers must be able to demonstrate proficiency in both English and Spanish and ESL teachers must demonstrate proficiency in English. The challenged regulations were rationally related to the state's legitimate interest in providing its students with competent, well-trained teachers. The decision in favor of the New Jersey Department of Education was ordered on April 29, 1980.

Transfer of LPI to College Approved Programs

On September 1, 1980 the administration of the LPI was transferred to colleges with teacher education programs in bilingual and ESL education. The transfer plan, under study for one year by the Department of Education, was approved for the purpose of aligning bilingual and ESL programs with

all other approved programs offered statewide in which eligibility for certification is recommended by colleges. To effect a smooth transfer in the assessment of oral language proficiency to the colleges, the Department of Education developed guidelines for implementation of the requirement. Efforts were made to respond to recommendations of the Task Force to Study Transfer of Language Proficiency Requirement as well as to concerns of professional groups. All aspects of the transfer were studied, including costs, standards, accountability, and provisions for students of small language groups.

Meetings were held with college bilingual and ESL coordinators and workshops provided to increase the number of trained college staff members as interviewers and raters. An additional 40 trained college staff members were added to the original groups of trained interviewers and raters.

Although colleges had flexibility in the mode of assessment chosen, most opted to continue the LPI, and minimum standards for proficiency were implemented statewide. The rating scale was maintained and anonymity among interviewers and raters preserved. Implementation plans were reviewed and approved by the Bureau of Teacher Education and Academic Credentials. Colleges entered into a consortium arrangement with one college coordinating the effort this year and assuming responsibility for the transmittal of tapes from interviewers and raters. Language proficiency interviews administered by five colleges in the consortium totaled 254 for 197 candidates through May 1981. Totals by language were: English - 175; Spanish - 58; Portuguese - 16; French - 5. LPI administration in the colleges is monitored by the Department of Education as part of the legally mandated on-site evaluations and re-evaluations of college teacher education programs.

Results of Language Proficiency Interview

As of June 1981 more than 3,000 language proficiency interviews were completed. During the past year of administration, 79 percent of the candidates achieved the required proficiency level on the Spanish interview and 77 percent on the English interview for bilingual certification; 75 percent achieved the required level on the English interview for ESL certification.

From July 1976 through March 1981, a total of 519 standard bilingual and 702 standard ESL certificates have been issued. Substandard certificates issued during that time totaled 632 for bilingual and 727 substandard certificates for ESL. Substandard certificates are issued to those applicants who have not completed all requirements for the regular certificate. Of significance is the steadily decreasing number of substandard certificates issued, from 90 percent in 1976-77 to 55 percent in 1979-80 for bilingual certification, and from 86 percent in 1976-77 to 58 percent in 1979-80 for ESL certification.

Since inception of the bilingual law and the promulgation of regulations governing bilingual and ESL certification in 1975, the New Jersey State Department of Education has achieved its mission to prepare well-trained teachers to teach in bilingual and ESL classrooms. Instructors in both Spanish and English must demonstrate proficiency in both languages. The need for such facility is obvious. Other states would profit from the same principle upheld in New Jersey.

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